

A Study of *Gone with the Wind* from the Perspective of Eco-feminism

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Abstract: *Gone with the Wind*, known as an “encyclopedia of the plantation legend”, is the masterpiece of famous American female writer Margret Mitchell. In 1937, the novel were rewarded the Pulitzer Prize. In *Gone with the Wind*, Margret sets the background of the American Civil War and describes a series of female characters who endow totally distinguished personality and destiny. Each of them makes different life choice when they are facing tough life and plights in their life.

The novel vividly shows the awareness of eco-feminism. From the perspective of eco-feminist, there is close relationship between women and nature. Nature conveys the emotion of women. Female not only represents the power of nature but also is a protector of nature. To build a harmonious relationship between human beings and nature, in addition, eco-feminism is object to the oppression of female and nature under the patriarchal concept, advocating using rebellious spirit to resist man’s oppression. Therefore, in order to further the research of the novel, the essay will study *Gone with the Wind* from the view of eco-feminism.

Keywords: Eco-feminism ; *Gone with the Wind* ; Women nature ; Harmony

1. Literature Review

In the American literature, *Gone with the Wind* receives much attention. Setting the background of American Civil War, it reflects the life of South America and presents a love story. It was adapted into popular movie, drawing many scholars to analyze it.

1.1 The Introduction to the Margaret Mitchell and *Gone with the Wind*

Margaret Mitchell, a famous woman writer, was born in Atlanta in 1900. During her whole life, she just published one novel *Gone with the Wind*, in which won both the National Book Award for Most Distinguished Novel and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1937. With the success in *Gone with the Wind*, she won a legendary position in world literature.

Margaret Mitchell was a reporter for the Atlanta Journal in 1922, providing certain new information every week. Such career experiences paved the way for her novel creation and supplied background information of civil war. In 1926, Margaret Mitchell started the creation of *Gone with the Wind*. Using nearly ten years finished the whole novel and its writing background based on the period of civil war. *Gone with the wind* was published in 1936 and caused the sensation. Mitchell’s book not only broke sales records but also set up a new sales record of 50,000 copies in one day. It was regarded as encyclopedia of the plantation legend and translated into 27 languages all over the world.

Based on the background about civil war and reconstruction in Georgia and Atlanta, *Gone with the Wind* describes a serious of female characters and male characters. The novel depicts Scarlett’s life, and reveals relationships with Ashley, Rhett Butler and Melanie Wilkes. Each of them has distinctive traits and destiny of characters. According to the description of love story, culture customs, behaviors, spirits and political system, *Gone with the Wind* succeed in presentation about civil war and social life of Southern area in the period of Lincoln.

1.2 The Theoretical Foundation of the Eco-feminism

Eco-feminism is a multi-cultural and interdisciplinary theory, owing many schools. Among enormous schools, the main branch of Eco-feminism encompasses Cultural Eco-feminism; Socialist Eco-feminism and Philosophical Eco-feminism.

The first school of Eco-feminism is Cultural Eco-feminism which pays attention to the culture and spiritual reason about nature and woman. And it also considers that the change of liberation about woman and nature is the most basic tools. Moreover, cultural eco-feminists believe that the dominance of nature and the dominance of female have relative external connection. So they desire to unlock the chain from man’s oppression. Secondly, Socialist Eco-feminism emphasizes on the essential social and economic reason of oppression between women and nature. They reckon that changing the social and economic system is the rudimentary tools of liberation between women and nature. Thirdly, philosophical Eco-feminists think that Eco-feminism is a concept that can control human’s behaviors and women and nature are under the concept structure of women and nature.

The three major schools of Eco-feminism above indicate that Eco-feminism is a multi-cultural theory. The central topic of Eco-feminism is constant to revolve the relationship about women and nature.

2. Analyses on the Eco-feminism in *Gone with the Wind*

After the introduction about personal experiences and the major context of *Gone with the Wind*, we get certain information about

the glory of the work and volume of sale. Beside, the historical problem of eco-feminism and the development progress of it had been solved. The chapter will come to the core of thesis.

2.1 Connection Between Nature and Women

Eco-feminists believe that the identification of women is the core of eco-feminism. The role of women has special meaning about giving life and reproductive process of natural cycle. Moreover, from the perspective of history and society, both of women and nature possess same experience and destiny in the patriarchal society. Therefore, the progress endows women privilege of insight nature in deep way. It is the reason that why women are more reliable on nature than men. In *Gone with the Wind*, the connection between women and nature can be represented through symbolic scene of nature.

2.1.1 Nature: Conveying the Emotion of Women

In *Gone with the Wind*, all natural landscapes have female characteristic, such as gentleness, beauty and quietness. There are lush forests, bright sun and clear creek. In the night, there is red road, peaceful cotton field and yellow river. However, earth is the most representative among the various natural landscapes, and “soft” is used to describing frequently earth. Meanwhile the word is also used to depicting females, particularly the model of the females—Ellen O’Hara¹, whose voice is always soft.

Earth is always portrayed as mother earth because both of them have the same ability to give birth to natural creature in the whole world. The cotton has nurtured the generation of Southern people. “Cotton was the heartbeat of the section; the planting and the picking were the diastole and systole of the red earth.” At the same time, earth console people like mother. In addition, earth not only raises her child, but also is a resource of women’s courage. For example, Scarlett gets back to Tara when she encounters setback.

2.1.2 Women: Representing the Power of Nature

The interrelationship between women and nature is presented in *Gone with the Wind*. Some of things in the nature are feminized and own the similar destiny to women, endowed with women’s feature. At the same time, women are naturalized in *Gone with the Wind*. Mitchell depicts vividly nature and female who live in Tara and shapes several female characters owning personal traits. These female figures, indicating certain thoughts of eco-feminism, possess naturalized appearance and personal behaviors and represent the power of nature in their way.

Women in this novel own the naturalized feature. Female is as simple as nature, such as wind, water, earth and forest. For example, Scarlett is too naïve to understand complex things and she is also unable to comprehend why the people in city don’t like her. Beside, the color of green embodies nature. There are green trees, green grasses and green hills in nature which represent the beauty of nature. Meanwhile, green is an emblem of hope health and power. It is the reason that why Scarlett is so attractive and vigorous.

2.1.3 Mutual Influence Between Nature and Women

Nature and women have mutual relationship in *Gone with the wind*. It is frequently regarded as a similarity between women and nature—mutual influence in patriarchal societies. In this novel, both of them are suffered a lot of hardships. In the following paragraph, the thesis will introduce the mutual influence between nature and women from two respects.

Women experience diverse plights in *Gone with the Wind*, such as assuming responsibility of war, lose of family members and poverty. The war triggered by men destroys the peaceful life of women. During the war, women have to begin another life style in order to taking the responsibility that men don’t assume. Women have to take care for wounded soldiers and to offer water and bed for them. Meanwhile, loneliness and fear overshadow women’s life.

In comparison with women, nature also suffers endless torments. All natural things, lush trees, beautiful animals and ornate houses, are severely destroyed by war. Flowers and grass are trampled by soldiers; vegetables are buried by ruins; the leaves on the branches are burned. In the countryside, all of the livestock, chickens, cows and horses are plundered by Northern soldiers. Besides trees and livestock, lands are treated in rude way. The fertile lands become barren. Before the war, soil of Atlanta is the best land for producing cotton. There are countless lands for planting the cottons. And majority yield of cotton in South comes from this land. But all gorgeous scenes vanish along with the war. Lands need a long time to recover their vigor before the war. All in all, both women and nature lose the precious ability.

2.2 Man’s Oppression Over Nature and Women

Nature and women relate to each other and both of them have different roles in the world. Therefore, eco-feminists are object to any form of oppression, especially the war triggered by man. Wars destroy human beings and ruin nature, bringing the fear of pain and death to the fellows. Based on the expounding above, this chapter will analyze man’s oppression over nature and women.

2.2.1 Women Under the Patriarchal Culture

Under Mitchell’s pen, Ellen is victim of patriarchy. Women don’t possess their property and devotes herself to her husband. Majority of women as men’s accessory have to take responsibility to care babies, clean house and waste dishes, while men have more leisure time to hunting, drinking and fighting in war.

In *Gone with the Wind*, Ellen also plays important role in it. The behavior of Ellen represents what women should do in a traditional family. She has to take advice from her husband every time even though already has own idea about the problem. Ellen is regarded as the true master of Tara and sustains the whole family, assuming the responsibility to care plantation. However, her husband considers that what she does is the traditional women should do. Women is born to take care of her home, while men takes grant for enjoying rights to choose their leisure time.

From perspective of Ellen, the author portrays tragedy life of women in that time. The attitude of their life is passive and pessimistic. They suffer the oppression of men, at the same time, while nature inflicts the same plights.

2.2.2 Nature Under the Patriarchal Culture

Agriculture is the most import economy revenue of South. Before the war, the red land in Georgia is fertile and the best place for local people to plant cotton. Land brings warm house and fortune to the people who have ever lived here. Through the war, these

1 Mitchell, Margaret. *Gone with the Wind*. New York: Macmillan, 1964, p. 10.

gorgeous views vanished and what they left is barren land. Northern soldiers destroy the cotton planted on land and loot the cows and chicken. If people endlessly destroy the nature, therefore, they must be punished by nature and fall into homelessness tragically.

In a word, nature in *Gone with the Wind* plays an important role in presenting negative influence of patriarchal culture. Through recording harmonious relationship of nature, Mitchell criticizes men as invader for nature world, showing her ecological awareness.

2.2.3 Rebellion Against Man's Oppression

Margaret Mitchell, as a feminist writer, expresses her hatred for man's oppression in *Gone with the Wind*. Through the description of Scarlett's personal change of experience and the negative influence of nature, both of them show the rebellion against man's oppression.

As the main role in *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett's life experience becomes the core of the novel concerning with. Scarlett bravely rebels the traditional rule of patriarchal culture and has faith for achieving the career what man can do. From the change of her personal experience during the war, her strongly rebel spirit against man's oppression can be perceived.

Nature is a victim of the war caused by the patriarchal culture. War destroys the lands, ruins the houses and kills the animals. Under the negative influence of nature, people's living environment is being threatened. As a result, the fertile lands for human surviving become barren and houses for people living are vanishing. Gradual, the rebel power of nature can be observed.

To sum up, the rebellion of man's oppression is showed through the change of Scarlett's personal experiences during the war and negative influences on destroyed nature.

2.3 Reconstruction of Harmonious Relationship

Eco-feminists advocate harmonious relationships among human beings regardless of religion, race and class. The core of eco-feminism is to build an equal way to treat human relationship. So they are eager to eliminate the inequality between women and men or female and male. On the other hand, eco-feminists aim to construct connections between human and nature, appeal to cooperation, sharing and protection. It is important for human to build an ecological harmony society.

2.3.1 Relationship Between Scarlett and Melanie

Eco-feminists consider that woman's harmonious relationships are equal to the ecological thoughts they have advocated.

In *Gone with the Wind*, though many readers consider that Scarlett is jealous to Melanie because of Ashley's love and her timid characteristic, however, both of women show the strong relationship and sisterhood through experiencing the war and various plights. For Scarlett, she cares and protects Melanie at the beginning of the war. Not only she promised Ashley's requirement, but also she views Melanie as her true friend though she is never aware of it. Meanwhile, Melanie is regarded as a teacher or spiritual pillar for Scarlett.

In *Gone with the Wind*, such relationships including caring, mutual friendship and sympathy are supported by eco-feminists. Eco-feminists hold these principles that it is important for human beings to build an ideal relationship.

2.3.2 Relationship Between Scarlett and Rhett

Eco-feminists consider that a harmonious relationship between female and male is the ultimate goal. And they also believe that the negative influence on inequality relationship between man and women do harm to the female and the male. Moreover, they argue that a sound, moral and harmonious society should establish on equality with each other. Only when human beings realize the core of oppression caused by men, they can crack man's domination and eliminate the bind of patriarchal thinking. In *Gone with the Wind*, such opinion is demonstrated from relationship between Scarlett and Rhett.

In *Gone with the Wind*, Rhett is the only man that recognizes the inner spirit of Scarlett and truly loves her. He loves her rebellious spirit and strong determination though he already realizes Scarlett's mask of gentility. He loves her though she isn't aware of who is the man she truly loves. Rhett is always behind Scarlett in many ways, either moral or financial support as Scarlett fall into the plights of the war.

Through the relationship between Scarlett and Rhett, the author describes a man without traditional thought. Rhett constructs an equal relationship with Scarlett, which demonstrates it is possible for female and male to build a harmonious relationship in the world. It is the thought that is eco-feminists' ultimate goal.

2.3.3 Relationship Between Humans and Nature

In *Gone with the wind*, the author gives detail descriptions of the natural environments and expresses her huge detest for the war, calling on harmonious, peaceful and beautiful relationships between human and nature. These vivid depicts of the charming landscape provide readers a finite imagination and visual pleasure. Under Mitchell's writing, nature has the characterization of people and human beings also show the trait of nature. She wish human beings coexist in harmonious environment.

Eco-feminists advocate harmonious coexistence, mutual development between human and nature. They are object to patriarchy culture, man's oppression and war. Only when human beings truly realize and pay attention to the harmonious relationship between human and nature, they can find a feasible solution to build a wonderful and beautiful society without any oppression and prejudice.

3. The Influence on Women and Nature

In *Gone with the Wind*, women regard men as their whole meaning of life and are dominated by men. Beside, in recent years, the problems about environmental pollutions and protections have become more and more urgent. Based on the analysis above, this chapter will give emphasis on the influence on modern women and nature.

3.1 The Impact on Modern Women

In *Gone with the Wind*, Margaret Mitchell describes a lot of classical female characters in vivid way. Margaret gives a detailed portrait of these figures. Under the author's description, each of them is endowed with specific features, such as brave Scarlett and traditional Melanie. The spirit from these female characters gives significant impact on modern women. So this part will introduce the influence from several perspectives.

Firstly, it is about perspectives from family and marriage. In *Gone with the Wind*, Melanie Hamilton is portrayed as a traditional, fragile and generous woman, who has the appearance of gentility. Compared with Scarlett, Melanie is an example of Southern girl. Melanie is so unselfish and gentle that she often considers questions from optimistic perspective and deal with them in better way. Melanie is a respectable girl not only because of her tolerance, kindness and selflessness, but also because of her love, faith and devotion to her home and her husband Ashley.

Secondly, it is about the perspective from job position. Modern woman can learn braveness from Scarlett. The spirit of braveness is playing an important role in today's job competition. Facing fierce competitive job market, women are often suffered discrimination in society. In order to solve the unequal status, women ought to break the traditional fetter and to voice her opinion, challenging the men's oppression with braveness.

3.2 The Impact on Contemporary Nature

In *Gone with the Wind*, Margaret gives a detailed description of the natural landscape. Under the Margaret writing, the land in North Georgia presents its charming beauty, such as red road, plowed cotton fields and yellow river. However, these beautiful scenes are destroyed by war.

Nature, the environment which human beings live by, is magnificent and unique. It nourishes all things in earth. In modern society, however, some industries and steam plants and metallurgical factories often lack self-discipline in their daily business operation, discharging various kinds of air pollutants into the atmosphere. For another thing, their responsibility of environmental protection is seldom truly performed. In the situation, under slack supervision system, these activities are bringing a negative influence to the urban development. Nature is being ruined in many large cities. Clean air and blue sky are gradually vanishing from these regions.

Facing such pressing nature problem, human beings make effort to create a new relationship of nature, strengthening ecological morality education.

4. Conclusion

In order to study the relationship between nature and female, the thesis researches *Gone with the Wind* from the perspective of eco-feminism. It talks about reconstruction of harmonious relationship. Meanwhile, the thesis also discusses the influence on women and nature. Modern women should develop their professional ability to face the fierce job competence and to benefit their marriage and family. In addition, human beings should have an awareness of ecological value to deal with the environmental problems.

To sum up, the eco-feminism conveyed by Mitchell is import for people to build a harmonious world.

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